ATLAS
MYSTERY TALES
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APR. NO. 40
ALL BRAND-NEW MYSTERY TALES
WHAT WAS THE SECRET OF THE MYSTERIOUS "HIDDEN LAND!"
DOES IT PAY TO IGNORE THE "VOICE OF WARNING!"

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FRED PHIPPS WAS A BOOKKEEPER...HE WAS MARRIED, HAD THREE CHILDREN AND A SMALL HOME! WITHIN FRED, AS WITHIN ALL MEN, THERE EXISTS A SMALL SPOT, A HIDDEN LAND OF DREAMS, OF POWER AND PRESTIGE, AN UNATTAINABLE LAND...EXCEPT ON RARE OCCASIONS!

THE HIDDEN LAND!

THREE BILLION, SIX HUNDRED MILLION... HOW ODD THAT SO MUCH MONEY SHOULD ONLY BE NUMBERS IN A BOOK TO *ME*! IT'S ONLY *REAL* TO MEN LIKE MR. CASTIN... A GIANT IN INDUSTRY AND FINANCE, A MAN OF POWER!

HAZE

MR. CASTIN'S A GREAT MAN ALL RIGHT! HIS CLIMB TO THE TOP WAS AMAZING!

HE'S TAKING PILLS AGAIN! HE LOOKS BAD! SHOULDN'T WONDER WITH ALL THE PRESSURES HE HAS ON HIM FROM THE GREAT EMPIRE HE'S BUILT!

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HEAR THE LATEST, FRED? THE BOSS'S KIDS ARE IN TROUBLE AGAIN, AND HIS WIFE IS SICK...

IT'S A SHAME, A MAN LIKE HIM TO HAVE SO MUCH TROUBLE!

MR. CASTIN'S A SICK MAN! TOO MUCH ON HIS MIND!

WONDER HOW A MAN GETS HIS ABILITY TO AMASS A FORTUNE, GRASP GREAT POWER IN SO SHORT A TIME!

HE WAS A PHOTOGRAPHER WITH A GROUP OF MUSEUM SCIENTISTS IN TIBET! HE GOT LOST AND WAS MISSING FOR DAYS! HE FINALLY WANDERED BACK TO CAMP... HE CAME HOME AND BEGAN HIS RISE TO FAME AND FORTUNE!

HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOU, FRED?

FINE! KIDS DOING WELL IN SCHOOL, WIFE FINE, AND I'VE NEVER FELT BETTER IN MY LIFE!

FRED HAD HIS LUNCH AND WENT BACK TO THE OFFICE AGAIN...

THEY SAY THAT PEOPLE ONLY WANT TO BE FRIENDLY WITH MR. CASTIN FOR WHAT HE CAN DO FOR THEM, AND IT'S MADE HIM CYNICAL!

LISTEN, DID YOU HEAR THE NEWS?

MR. CASTIN'S DOCTOR ORDERED HIM HOME TO BED AND THEN HE HAS TO TAKE A LONG VACATION! HE LEFT PAPERS ON HIS DESK! GO IN AND TIDY THE PLACE UP, WILL YOU?

SO FRED WENT INTO THE GREAT MAN'S OFFICE! IT WAS THEN HE FOUND THE *RING!*

MUST BE MR. CASTIN'S! WHAT AN ODD RING... NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE IT!

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HE SLIPPED THE STRANGE RING ON HIS OWN FINGER...

I REMEMBER NOW SEEING HIM WEARING IT! THAT'S STRANGE! I FEEL SOMEHOW DIFFERENT!

THE *RING*... *THAT'S* HOW MR. CASTIN ROSE SO RAPIDLY IN THE WORLD! NOW I HAVE IT! NOW I CAN BE A SUCCESS IN LIFE, INSTEAD OF A FAILURE!

THOSE STOCK SHEETS I SAW YESTERDAY... THOSE STOCKS COULD BE MANIPULATED AND A MAN COULD MAKE A FORTUNE!

SUDDENLY THE RING SEEMED TO TUG AT HIS FINGER... AND HE SAW THE SHADOWY FIGURES FOLLOWING HIM...

THEY'RE AFTER ME! THEY WANT TO TAKE THE RING AWAY FROM ME!

NO! THEY *CAN'T* HAVE IT!

THE RING IS MINE NOW! THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT, ISN'T IT? YOU CAN'T HAVE IT!

YES, IT IS THE RING WE WANT! LOOK INTO MY EYES... LOOK DEEP...

HE FELT HIS BODY FLOATING AWAY, HIS BEING LEAVING THAT SPOT! HE WAS IN INFINITY, IN TIME AND SPACE.., AND THE EYES WERE THERE, GUIDING HIM...

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WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE AM I?

YOU ARE IN A HIDDEN LAND, DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS OF TIBET! WE TRANSPORTED YOU HERE...

THE RING IS OURS! A YEAR AGO A MAN WANDERED HERE! WE TENDED HIM AND HE STOLE ***THE RING***! IT HAS MANY POWERS... MORE THAN YOU COULD EVER REALIZE!

IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT SOMEDAY IN THE FAR FUTURE, ALL MEN WILL BECOME PURE OF HEART, AND WE SHALL GIVE THE RING TO THE WORLD AND MANKIND SHALL REACH GREAT HEIGHTS! WILL YOU RETURN IT TO US?

THEY WOULDN'T HURT ME OR ATTEMPT TO TAKE IT FROM ME! I COULD HAVE POWER, WEALTH... EVERYTHING!

AND THEN HE REMEMBERED... THE BOSS AND HIS PILLS, HIS ILLNESS, THE PRESSURES, NO FRIENDS! ALL THIS MIGHT COME WITH THE SUCCESS HE CRAVED!

ARE YOU THINKING THAT ***THE RING*** WILL BRING YOU SUCCESS? THINK MORE DEEPLY, MY SON...

I HAVE! HERE, TAKE BACK YOUR RING! IT BELONGS TO ***YOU*** AND TO THE ***FUTURE***!

SUDDENLY HE WAS GONE FROM THAT PLACE OF GREAT PEACE... HE WAS ON THE STREET IN HIS OWN TOWN, AND HIS HOUSE WAS UP THE BLOCK, WARMTH FLOODING FROM ITS WINDOWS!

LIL WILL HAVE A WONDERFUL DINNER READY AND THE CHILDREN WILL SIT AROUND THE TABLE, LAUGHING AND TALKING! AND LATER OUR ***FRIENDS*** WILL DROP IN...

WHO SAYS I'M ***NOT*** A ***SUCCESSFUL*** MAN? I HAVE EVERYTHING A MAN COULD WANT... HAPPINESS AND CONTENTMENT! I DON'T NEED THE RING! FRED PHIPPS, A ***SUCCESSFUL MAN*** ...THAT'S ME!

THE END

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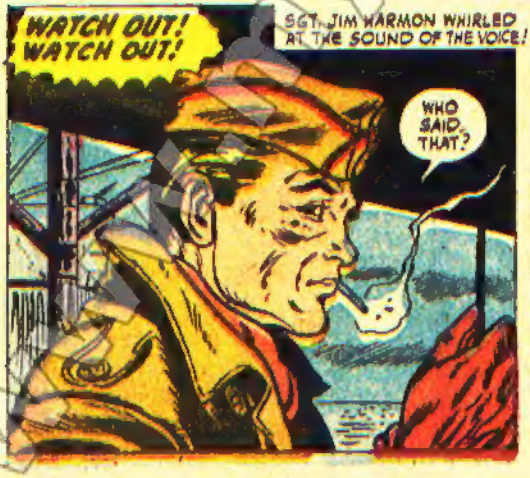
IT WAS A VOICE IN THE NIGHT, A STRANGE VOICE, AND SGT. JIM HARMON NEEDED ITS STARTLING CRY!

A WARNING VOICE!

TWO YEARS ON DUTY IN GERMANY! BOBBY IS SEVEN NOW! I WONDER IF HE REMEMBERS ME!
A MYSTERY TALE TO HOLD YOU BREATHLESS!
J-25
Vic Carrabotta



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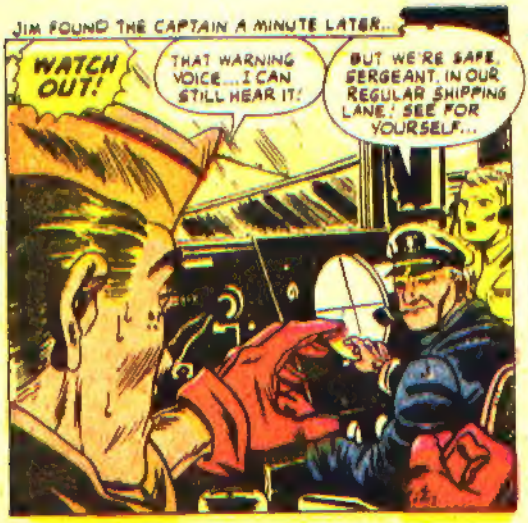
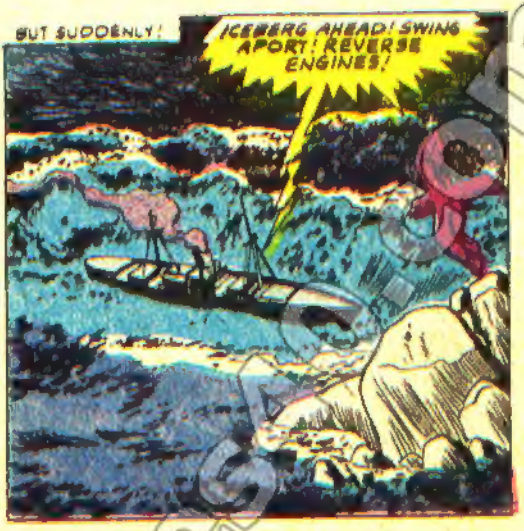
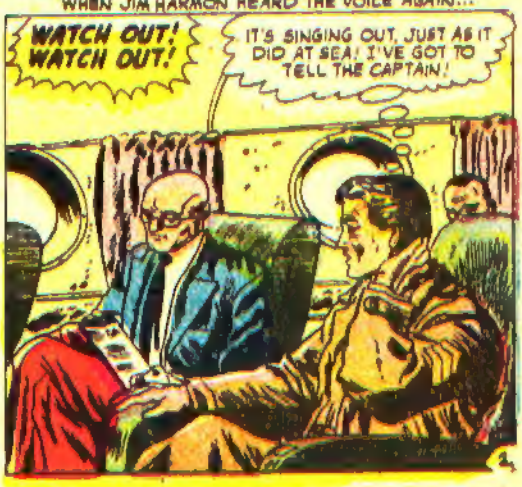

JIM FOUND THE CAPTAIN A MINUTE LATER...
WATCH OUT!
THAT WARNING VOICE... I CAN STILL HEAR IT!
BUT WE'RE SAFE, SERGEANT. IN OUR REGULAR SHIPPING LANE! SEE FOR YOURSELF...



WHEN THE BIG SHIP DOCKED IN NEW YORK, JIM HARMON HAD FORGOTTEN THE VOICE. IN HIS EAGERNESS TO GET HOME...
TAXI! TAKE ME TO LAGUARDIA FIELD!
HOP IN, SOLDIER!


THE AIRLINER WAS WINGING ITS WAY OVER THE ROCKIES, WHEN JIM HARMON HEARD THE VOICE AGAIN...
WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT!
IT'S SINGING OUT, JUST AS IT DID AT SEA! I'VE GOT TO TELL THE CAPTAIN!

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I'VE FLOWN THIS ROUTE A HUNDRED TIMES! I COULD MAKE 'FRISCO WITH MY EYES CLOSED!
I TELL YOU THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG AHEAD, CAPTAIN!

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WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT!
THERE'S SOME KIND OF DANGER AHEAD, DRIVER... YOU'D BETTER SLOW DOWN!
GEE, SERGEANT, I JUST CAME OVER THIS ROAD BEFORE I PICKED YOU UP...

THE CAB DETOURED, AND IT TOOK JIM A HALF-HOUR LONGER TO GET HOME...
OH, DARLING! BOBBY'S DONE NOTHING BUT TALK ABOUT YOUR COMING FOR THE PAST FOUR DAYS!
WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT!
THE WARNING AGAIN! BOBBY'S IN DANGER!

BOBBY INSISTED ON PLAYING THIS OLD CRACKED RECORD OVER AND OVER! HE SAID IT WOULD HELP TO GET YOU HOME SAFELY! IT GETS STUCK AT THAT ONE PLACE ALL THE TIME... "WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT!"
ELEANOR, PLAY IT AGAIN!

WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT FOR JIMMY VALENTINE, FOR HE'S A VERY GOOD FRIEND OF MINE...
YOU SEE, HE ASSOCIATED THE NAME JIMMY WITH YOU!
BOBBY WAS RIGHT! IT DID HELP ME GET HOME SAFELY!
THE END

THE TRAVELERS

NO one knows just when the Jesters did move in. All agreed that the house on the corner had been dark and deserted the night before. Yet, almost magically, the house was bright and bustling with activity on the next day. No one had heard any unusual noise. No one had seen a moving van unloading. Yet, there they were.

There was no sign of cases, barrels or boxes. Clean curtains adorned the windows. And one neighbor, glancing curiously through the open door as she passed by, noted that the house seemed fully furnished and carpeted from wall-to-wall.

The Jesters proved a congenial couple. They warmly welcomed a delegation of puzzled neighbors that night and completely captivated them with their droll manners and quaint dress. But they made no effort to explain their sudden appearance on the scene until Tom Jackson decided to break the ice.

"Frankly, I wasn't sure the builders would ever sell this house," he remarked after the whole group settled in the living room. "They called it *the house of the future*, but although it's loaded with all the most modern gadgets and contrivances, it's just sat here unoccupied for six months. I've heard many people rave that it was simply out of this world, but there were no buyers to take it off the builders' hands until you came along. Not that I'm implying," he added hastily, "that you people made a mistake."

"Not at all," Mr. Jester put Tom immediately at ease. Then he grinned impishly and winked at his wife. "I guess we're just out-of-this-world kind of characters. We wanted a house. We spotted this one. It was empty and suited our specifications perfectly. So we moved in."

"We were all rather surprised to see the house occupied so suddenly," Ruth Nolan volunteered. "It had been empty so long, and we never noticed anyone inspecting the grounds or talking to the builder."

"Oh, we're great ones for fast decisions," Mr. Jester replied airily. "We both like to travel around and we find a spot that interests us and then we settle down. We're not tied down by time and obligations like most of you people . . ."

He broke off as he caught his wife's warning glance.

"What Ajax means," Mrs. Jester interposed swiftly, "is that we don't have the responsibility of children or job dependency in any particular place. We have ample means that allow us a great degree of freedom." She uttered her words with no overtones of boastfulness, and her new neighbors didn't press the point.

"Perhaps there's some way we can be of some assistance," Grace Jackson offered. "If there's any shopping at the stores, we'd be more than willing. And if our husbands can lend a hand with Mr. Jester's heavy work around the house . . ."

Ajax Jester made a wry face. "I must confess I'm allergic to physical labor. That's why all the gadgets in this house appealed to me. Living's so much easier when you're rested and relaxed. I'm sure that my wife appreciates your shopping suggestion, too, but we stocked up on our vitamins and calories before we arrived."

The neighborhood consensus was that the Jesters were completely charming but certainly odd people. Most of them speculated that the Jesters were born with silver spoons in their mouths and that they had been somewhat spoiled by their devil-may-care existence. The mystery surrounding their sudden arrival was accepted but not forgotten, nor were the eccentricities often manifested by Ajax Jester.

Then came the memorable evening when the Jesters held a television party in their home. They seemed oddly preoccupied with even commonplace programs, and Tom Jackson commented that he hadn't seen such avid viewers in years.

"We've been so busy traveling recently that we've had no chance to really tune in TV," Ajax explained quickly. "But that's not the only reason I was so absorbed. TV now is a medium of entertainment and education. But it is only a mirror of the present. What a shame people today can't telescreen themselves into fascinating periods of the past or into the

CONTINUED BEFORE LAST STORY

limitless wonders of the future."

"Well, perhaps someday we'll be able to do that," Bill Nolan said with a faraway look in his eyes. "I'm convinced that our descendants have a great future in store for them."

"You're absolutely right," Ajax agreed. "Some day, people will free themselves from the ties of time and dimension, and then there will be whole new worlds to conquer."

Everybody's attention was diverted as Tom Jackson knocked over an ashtray and spilled its contents across the carpet. "Awfully clumsy of me," he apologized profusely. "If you'll get me a dustpan, I'll gladly clean it up."

"Don't be silly, old man," Ajax reassured him. He waved his hand negligently in the direction of the littered cigarette stubs and ashes, and they were all suddenly whisked away into a wicker basket placed in a corner of the room. Everyone gaped in astonishment, and Ajax felt impelled to offer some explanation.

"Sometimes, I get carried away by some of the magician tricks I've learned in my travels," he said glibly.

"Now, Ajax!" his wife scolded him with mock severity. "Why do you enjoy fooling people so? You'll have to be believing what you see is true."

She turned a glowing face to the rest of the group. "Actually, I don't believe even you people realize how ultra-modern this house really is. It's wired all over for sound, and it also has an unusual concealed cleaning device. I merely pressed the button, and it activated the suction device in the wicker basket. The basket really houses a form of noiseless vacuum and it has huge drawing power. Please don't let my husband persuade you that he has powers of levitation or that he can exert mind over matter."

They accepted her words in stunned silence. In the lull that followed, it seemed only natural for everyone present to focus his attention on the TV screen. The channel tuned in was carrying a fascinating documentary movie on ancient Rome, and it claimed everyone's interest until the conclusion of the show.

"My, those were fascinating days," Bill Nolan observed wistfully.

"Indeed they were," Ajax sighed. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were able to travel back to those times. We could stroll around and observe the great events of history as they unfolded."

The party broke up a little later, and soon all the house lights winked out in the neighborhood. The next day, the Jester house seemed strangely silent. It wasn't until late in the day that one of their neighbors came to inquire if anything was wrong. Even then, nobody suspected the truth.

The house was empty. The furniture was [illegible] with the occupants. In the drawers, the neighbors found a few maps, dating from antiquity to 2900 A.D. The only other items in the house were a flowing white toga and a pair of gold sandals that were found in the front guest closet.

"That's odd," Tom Jackson said in a strained voice. "I had the strangest dream of my life last night, and it was about a toga. I felt as though I were flying through space and time, and I was aware of the fact that I was wearing a toga and a pair of gold sandals instead of my regular clothes. Some voice kept urging me on, telling me that I shouldn't falter. He kept saying that I shouldn't miss the spectacle of Nero fiddling while Rome burned. But then, suddenly, I wanted to be back. And I began to fly back to my own century. He kept calling after me, telling me I was wasting a great opportunity . . . I guess I woke up then."

He stared fixedly at the sandals and the toga. "It's amazing how much they resemble the clothes I wore in my dream. But I guess I just allowed my mind to run riot after seeing that movie last night and talking to Ajax . . ."

His voice broke off, and he stared at the people around him. "Just where is Ajax now?" he asked.

Nobody ever did find out what happened to the Jesters. They disappeared just as suddenly as they had arrived. The house has remained. Only the toga, the time-charts, the maps and the memories remain.

THE END J-219

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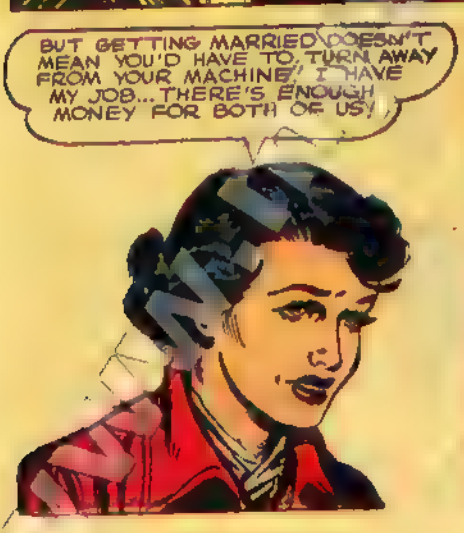
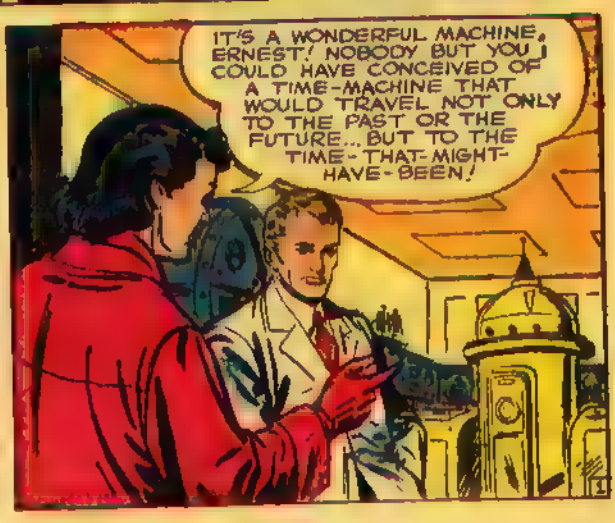
ALL THE PENT-UP FEELING INSIDE ERNEST FALTER EXPLODED IN A BURST OF ANGER! WHY DID SHE HAVE TO DRAG HIS MIND AWAY FROM HIS BELOVED MACHINE AND COMPEL HIM TO MAKE AN IRREVOCABLE DECISION!

CROSSROADS OF DESTINY!

I WON'T TURN AWAY FROM MY MACHINE AND GET A STEADY JOB AND MARRY YOU... SO I'M SELFISH AND CRUEL!
ERNEST, PLEASE LIS-...N. THAT'S NOT WHAT I'VE COME TO SAY AT ALL!
A MYSTERY TALE TO HOLD YOU BREATHLESS!
J40




IT'S A WONDERFUL MACHINE, ERNEST! NOBODY BUT YOU COULD HAVE CONCEIVED OF A TIME-MACHINE THAT WOULD TRAVEL NOT ONLY TO THE PAST OR THE FUTURE... BUT TO THE TIME-THAT-MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN!

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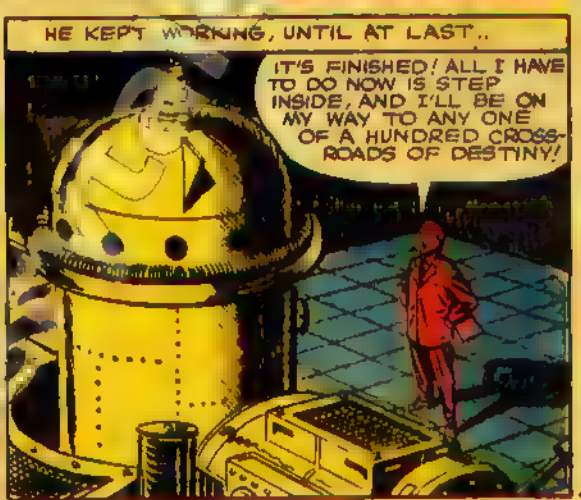
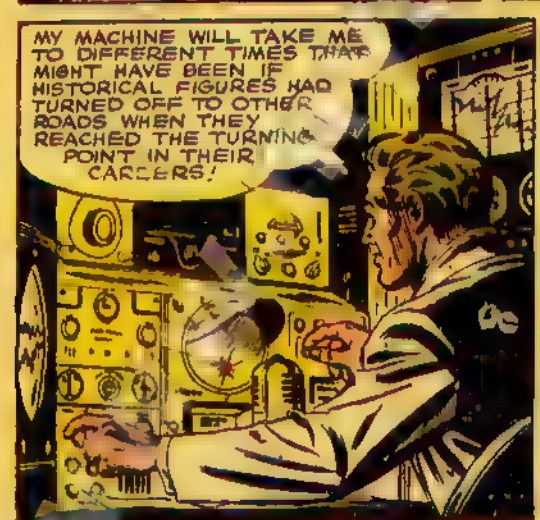

HE KEPT WORKING, UNTIL AT LAST..
IT'S FINISHED! ALL I HAVE TO DO NOW IS STEP INSIDE, AND I'LL BE ON MY WAY TO ANY ONE OF A HUNDRED CROSS-ROADS OF DESTINY!


MY MACHINE WILL TAKE ME TO DIFFERENT TIMES THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN IF HISTORICAL FIGURES HAD TURNED OFF TO OTHER ROADS WHEN THEY REACHED THE TURNING POINT IN THEIR CAREERS!

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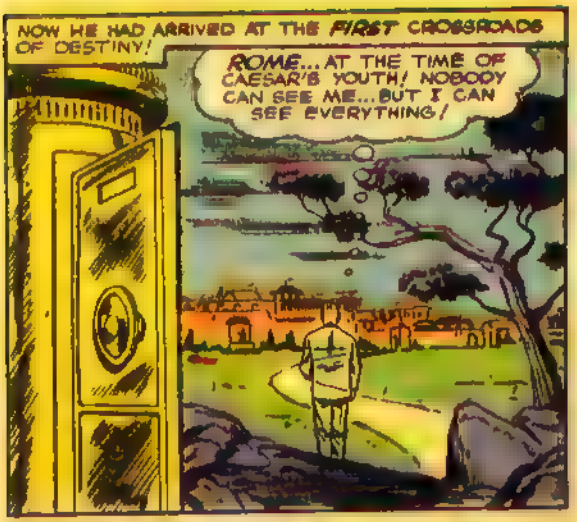
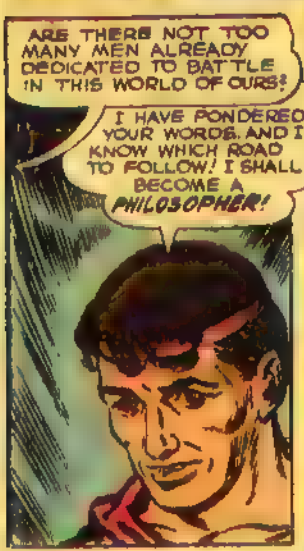
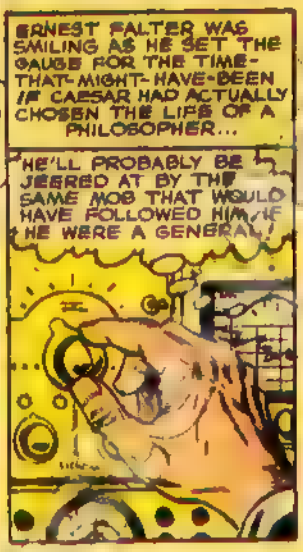

NOW HE HAD ARRIVED AT THE FIRST CROSSROADS OF DESTINY!
ROME... AT THE TIME OF CAESAR'S YOUTH! NOBODY CAN SEE ME... BUT I CAN SEE EVERYTHING!

THERE HE IS NOW!
YOU ARE TROUBLED, CAESAR! WHY?
SHOULD I ENTER THE ARMY AND BECOME A GENERAL OR SHOULD I STAY ON HERE AT THE ACADEMY AND BECOME A PHILOSOPHER?


ARE THERE NOT TOO MANY MEN ALREADY DEDICATED TO BATTLE IN THIS WORLD OF OURS?
I HAVE PONDERED YOUR WORDS, AND I KNOW WHICH ROAD TO FOLLOW! I SHALL BECOME A PHILOSOPHER!


ERNEST FALTER WAS SMILING AS HE SET THE GAUGE FOR THE TIME-THAT-MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN IF CAESAR HAD ACTUALLY CHOSEN THE LIFE OF A PHILOSOPHER...
HE'LL PROBABLY BE JEERED AT BY THE SAME MOB THAT WOULD HAVE FOLLOWED HIM IF HE WERE A GENERAL!

BUT HIS SMILE FADED WHEN HE SAW WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN...
THE WORLD HAS NEVER KNOWN SUCH CONTENTMENT BEFORE!
BUT IT WAS NOT ALWAYS SO!

A GASP OF DISBELIEF, AND THEN THE JOURNEY BACK THROUGH THE TIME-WARPS...
SO THAT'S WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, IF CAESAR HAD CHOSEN ANOTHER CAREER! LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS AT THE NEXT CROSSROADS!

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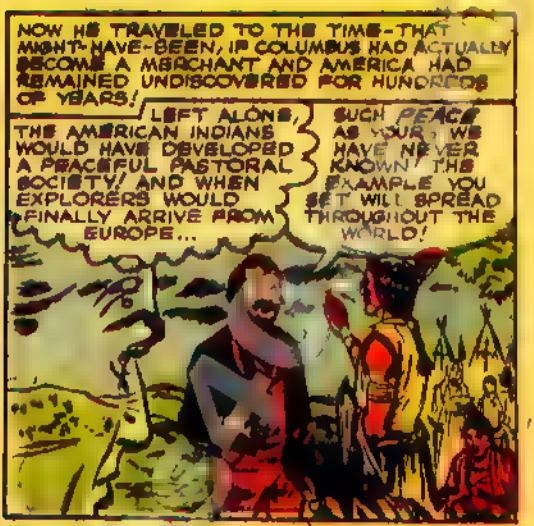
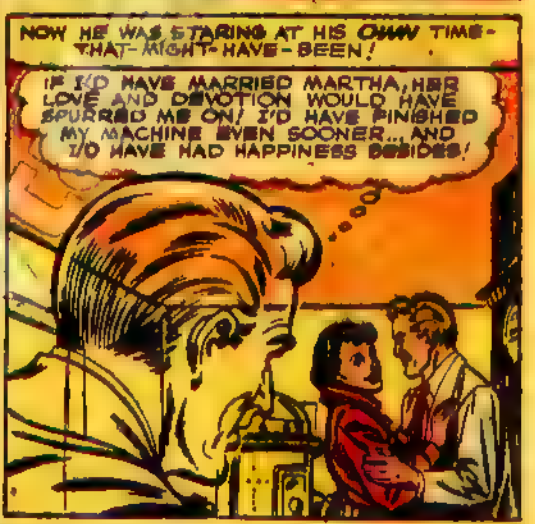
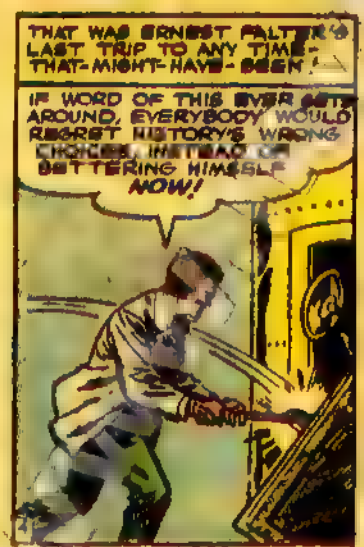
THIS TIME HE TRAVELED TO 15TH CENTURY GENOA...
TAKE MY ADVICE... FOLLOW THE SEA, COLUMBUS! SAILING IS WHAT YOU WERE BORN TO DO!
I HAVE MADE UP MY MIND TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MERCHANT... AND I'LL BE NOTHING ELSE!


NOW HE TRAVELED TO THE TIME-THAT MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN, IF COLUMBUS HAD ACTUALLY BECOME A MERCHANT AND AMERICA HAD REMAINED UNDISCOVERED FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS!
LEFT ALONE, THE AMERICAN INDIANS WOULD HAVE DEVELOPED A PEACEFUL PASTORAL SOCIETY! AND WHEN EXPLORERS WOULD FINALLY ARRIVE FROM EUROPE...
SUCH PEACE AS YOURS, WE HAVE NEVER KNOWN! THE EXAMPLE YOU SET WILL SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD!


NOW HE WAS STARING AT HIS OWN TIME-THAT-MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN!
IF I'D HAVE MARRIED MARTHA, HER LOVE AND DEVOTION WOULD HAVE SPURRED ME ON! I'D HAVE FINISHED MY MACHINE EVEN SOONER... AND I'D HAVE HAD HAPPINESS BESIDES!


THAT WAS ERNEST FALTER'S LAST TRIP TO ANY TIME-THAT-MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN!
IF WORD OF THIS EVER GOT AROUND, EVERYBODY WOULD REGRET HISTORY'S WRONG CHOICES, INSTEAD OF BETTERING HIMSELF NOW!

ERNEST FALTER WAS A WISER MAN WHEN HE LEFT THE WRECKAGE BEHIND HIM! BUT WHAT WAS LEFT FOR HIM NOW THAT HIS BELOVED MACHINE HAD BEEN DESTROYED?

LOVE AND WORK THAT WOULD BENEFIT SOCIETY... THEY WERE LEFT FOR HIM!
I LOVE YOU! I'VE TAKEN A JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY... TEACHING! MARTHA, WILL YOU...
OF COURSE, ERNEST! YOU SENT ME AWAY, BUT I'VE NEVER STOPPED WAITING...AND HOPING!
THE END

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IN A WAY, YOU COULDN'T BLAME SAMMY FOR THE PRECAUTIONS HE TOOK! HE KNEW HE MUST GUARD HIS SECRET WELL, AWAY FROM ALL EYES, AND SO HE LIVED ONLY FOR THE COMING OF NIGHT AND THE PROTECTIVE CLOAK OF DARKNESS!

SAMMY'S SECRET!

THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY RECOLLECTION AS TO HOW IT ALL BEGAN, BUT IT SEEMED HE HAD ALWAYS FLOWN... EFFORTLESSLY, SILENTLY AND WITH THE GRACE OF A BIRD...

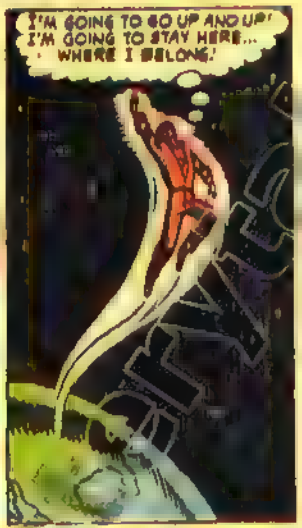
BUT THE SIGHT OF STRANGERS WOULD CAUSE HIS HEART TO BEAT FASTER, AND HE WAS ALERTED TO A NAMELESS DANGER...
ANOTHER MINUTE AND THEY WOULD HAVE SEEN ME! THEN WHAT WOULD I HAVE DONE?

SCANNED BY MYSTERYTALES40.COM

DURING THE LONG SUMMER DAYS, SAMMY OPERATED THE TRACTOR ON HIS FATHER'S FARM, BUT OFTEN HIS EYES WERE FIXED ON THE BLUE SKIES ABOVE...

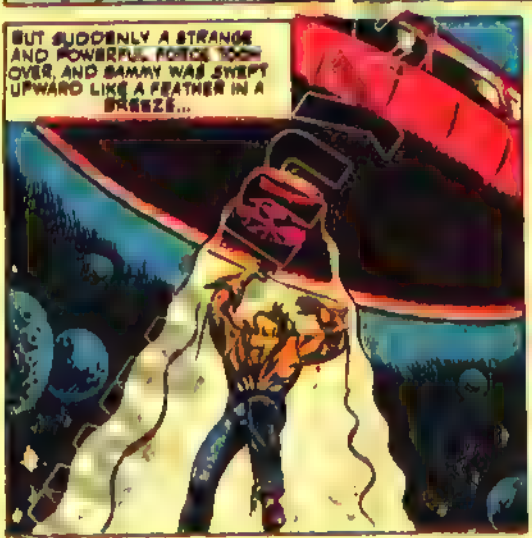
AND AT NIGHT WHILE HIS PARENTS SLEPT, THE URGE TO FLY WOULD BECOME STRONG AND COMPELL HIM

BUT ONCE IN THE FREE AIR OF THE COOL NIGHT, HE WOULD FORGET HIS LONELINESS, AND HE THRILLED TO THIS STRANGE POWER THAT HAD SET HIM APART FROM ALL THE OTHERS...



UP AND UP HE WENT OUT OF THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE, AND INTO THE AIRLESS VOID OF OUTER SPACE.

BUT SUDDENLY A STRANGE AND POWERFUL FORCE TOOK OVER, AND SAMMY WAS SWEPT UPWARD LIKE A FEATHER IN A BREEZE...



AND THE MOMENT SAMMY WAS DRAWN INTO THE STRANGE SHIP, THE DOOR SLAMMED SHUT.

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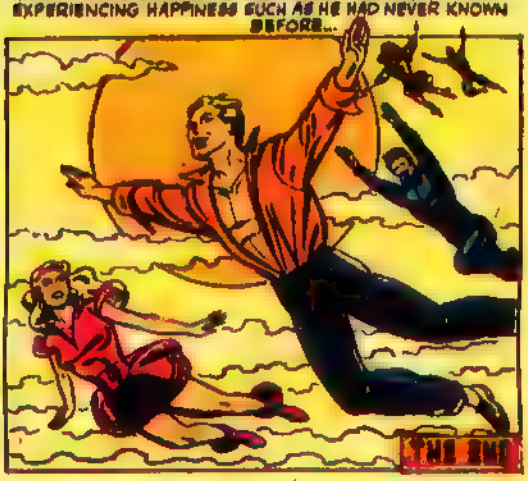
ON THROUGH SPACE THE STRANGE SHIP DRONED, AND AT LONG LAST WHEN SAMMY REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS...

I WAS LEAVING THERE ANYWAY! THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN ASHAMED OF ME ON EARTH IF THEY KNEW MY SECRET... JUST AS YOU MUST BE!
I COULD NEVER BE ASHAMED OF YOU, POROK!

MY NAME IS SAMMY, BUT YOU CALLED ME POROK... WHY?
ON THE PLANET VENUS, IT IS THE NAME FOR ONE WHO WAS LOST! COME TO THE PORTHOLE AND LOOK! WE APPROACH OUR SPACEPORT NOW!

YOU WERE LOST ON EARTH MANY YEARS AGO ON AN EXPLORING SURVEY! NO DOUBT YOU WERE ADOPTED AS AN EARTHLING ORPHAN, BUT WE NEVER GAVE UP OUR SEARCH! WE KNEW THE URGE TO FLY WOULD FORCE YOU TO LEAVE! LUCKILY WE WERE ON HAND! GO NOW, AND GREET THOSE WHO LOVE YOU!

FOR THE FIRST TIME, SAMMY FLEW UNDER THE GOLDEN BRIGHTNESS OF THE DAZZLING SUN! A HAPPY SMILE TOUCHED HIS LIPS, AND WITH THE BURDEN OF HIS SECRET REMOVED, HE WAS EXPERIENCING HAPPINESS SUCH AS HE HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE...



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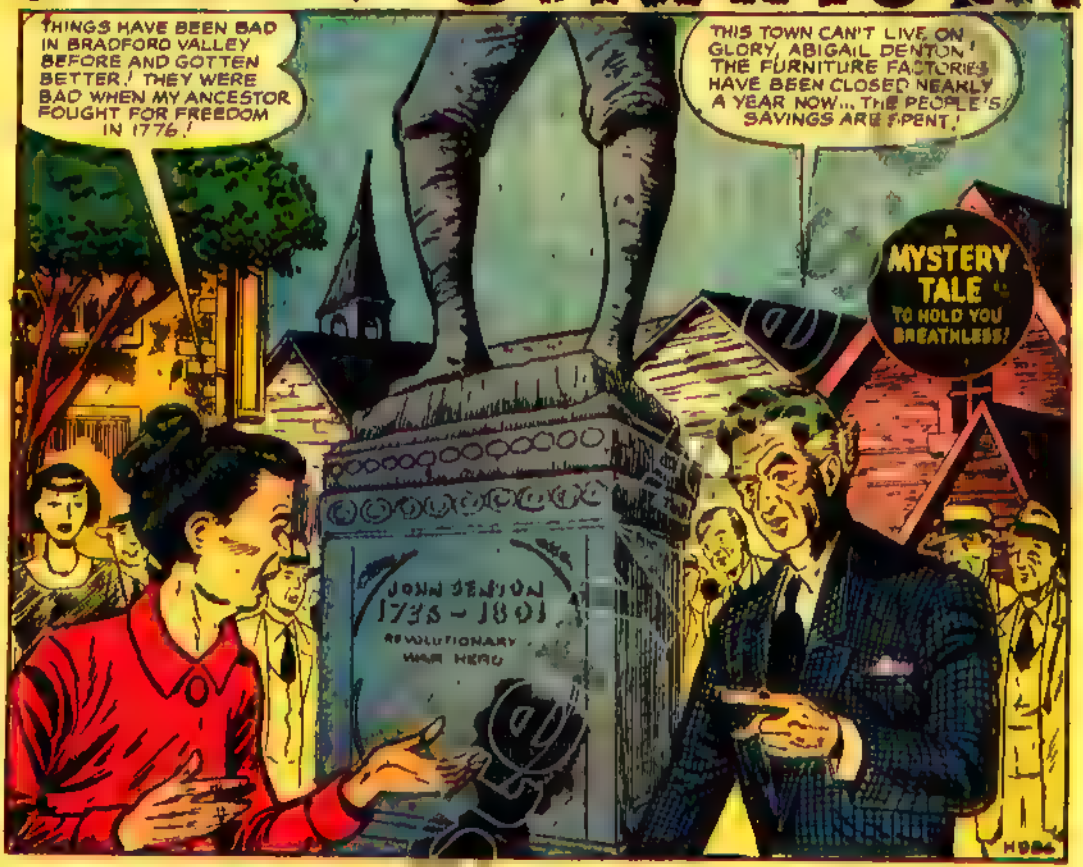
THE GOOD PEOPLE OF BRADFORD VALLEY WERE IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR UNTIL AN UNKNOWN VISITOR BROUGHT BACK THEIR COURAGE WITHOUT UTTERING A WORD!

THE SILENT STRANGER


THINGS HAVE BEEN BAD IN BRADFORD VALLEY BEFORE AND GOTTEN BETTER! THEY WERE BAD WHEN MY ANCESTOR FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM IN 1776!
THIS TOWN CAN'T LIVE ON GLORY, ABIGAIL DENTON! THE FURNITURE FACTORIES HAVE BEEN CLOSED NEARLY A YEAR NOW... THE PEOPLE'S SAVINGS ARE SPENT!
A MYSTERY TALE TO HOLD YOU BREATHLESS!
JOHN DENTON
1735 - 1801
REVOLUTIONARY WAR HERO

MAYOR ANDREWS... IS IT GOING TO MAKE THINGS BETTER TO REMOVE JOHN DENTON'S STATUE?
IT'S AN EYE-SORE, ABIGAIL! THE MONUMENT WILL BE SAFE ENOUGH IN THE WAREHOUSE!

ABIGAIL DENTON HELD BACK HER TEARS TILL HER ANCESTOR'S MONUMENT WAS DEPOSITED IN THE WAREHOUSE...

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ABIGAIL DID NOT GIVE UP!
JOHN DENTON BUILT MY HOME 150 YEARS AGO! HE BRAVED WILDERNESS AND HARDSHIP! YOU MUST FIGHT BACK, AS HE DID!
THE PEOPLE HAVE NO MONEY! FIGHT BACK? NOW, ABIGAIL?
I DON'T KNOW, MR. HIGGINS, BUT THERE MUST BE A WAY!
PEOPLE TALK OF MOVING OUT, TO A TOWN WHERE THERE IS WORK!
THEY'D DESERT THE TOWN MY FOREBEARS HELPED TO BUILD! THERE MUST BE SOME WAY TO STOP THEM!
A STRANGER APPEARED IN TOWN A FEW DAYS LATER...
WONDER WHO HE IS? I MUST FIND OUT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT?
BUT YOU'RE THE MAYOR, SAM! SURELY HE'D ANSWER YOU, IF YOU TALKED TO HIM!
I DID TALK TO HIM, ABIGAIL, BUT HE WOULDN'T ANSWER!
WHAT COULD HE WANT WITH THE HADLEY HOUSE? IT'S BEEN EMPTY SINCE OLD BART HADLEY PASSED ON 17 YEARS AGO!
MAYBE HE'S A DISTANT RELATIVE, COME TO CLAIM THE PLACE!
THE TOWNSPEOPLE FELT SOME INVISIBLE COMPULSION TO FOLLOW THE SILENT STRANGER'S LEAD...
HE'S WORKED SOME MAGIC ON US, ABIGAIL... HYPNOTISM, MAYBE!
LET'S WAIT AND SEE, BEFORE MAKING UP OUR MINDS ABOUT HIM, SAM!

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SOON THE ANCIENT HOUSE WAS NO MORE, AND EVERYONE IN TOWN OBEYED THE URGE TO FOLLOW THE STRANGER TO THE FACTORY WITH PLANKS AND GLASS...

MY PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED!
THEN YOU MUST'VE PRAYED FOR SOME BUSYBODY, TO COME TO BRADFORD VALLEY AND SET THE PEOPLE TO WORK ON A USELESS TASK!

THE STRANGER SPOKE NOT A WORD, YET ALL SEEMED TO KNOW SOMEHOW THE MEANS OF REPAIRING AND ALTERING MACHINE PARTS..

AND IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THE WHOLE TOWN FELT COMPELLED TO REPAIR AND PAINT THEIR NEGLECTED HOMES AND SHOPS...

AT LAST ALL THE WORK WAS DONE AND THE TOWN SPARKLED, BUT THE PEOPLE WERE ANGRY...

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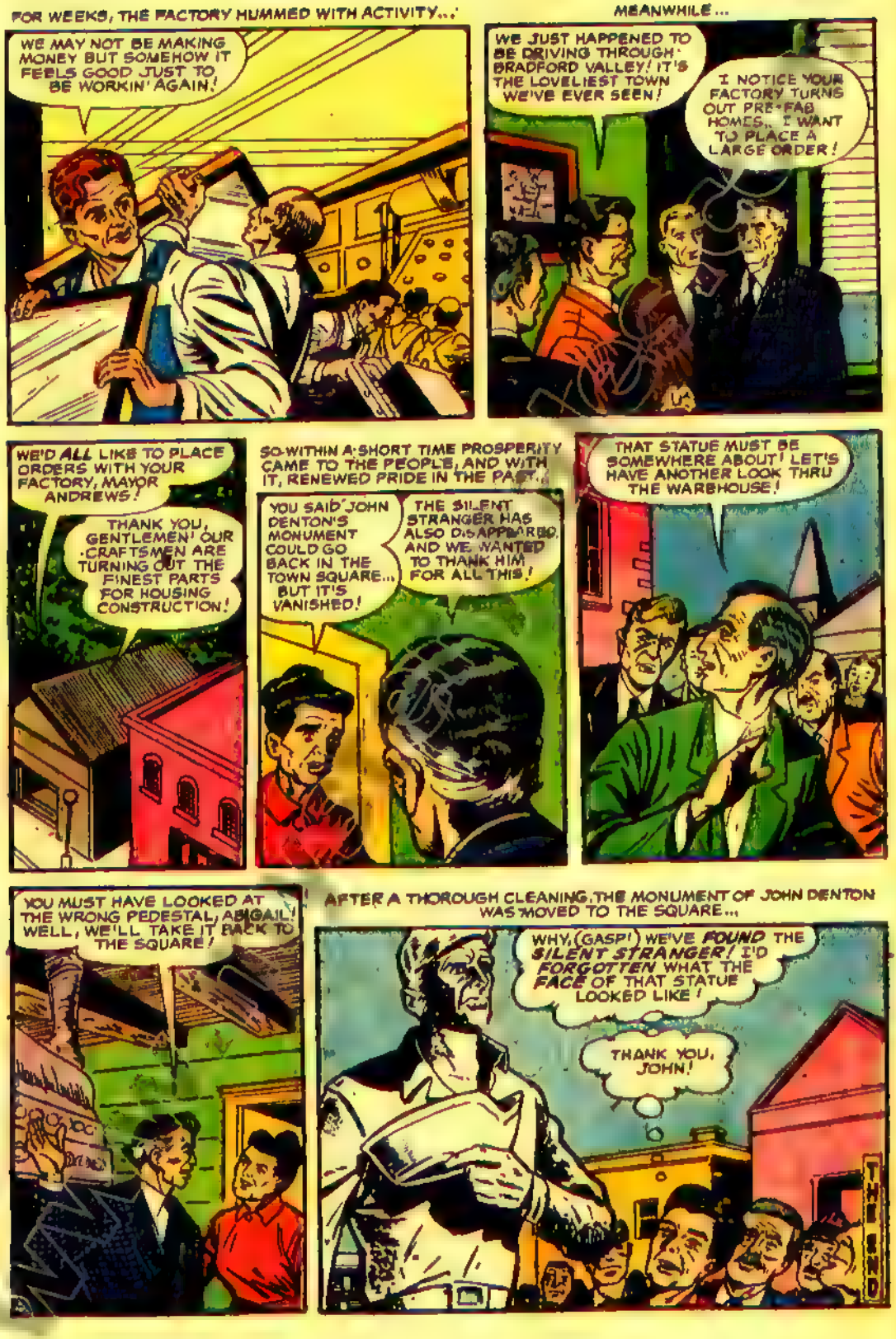
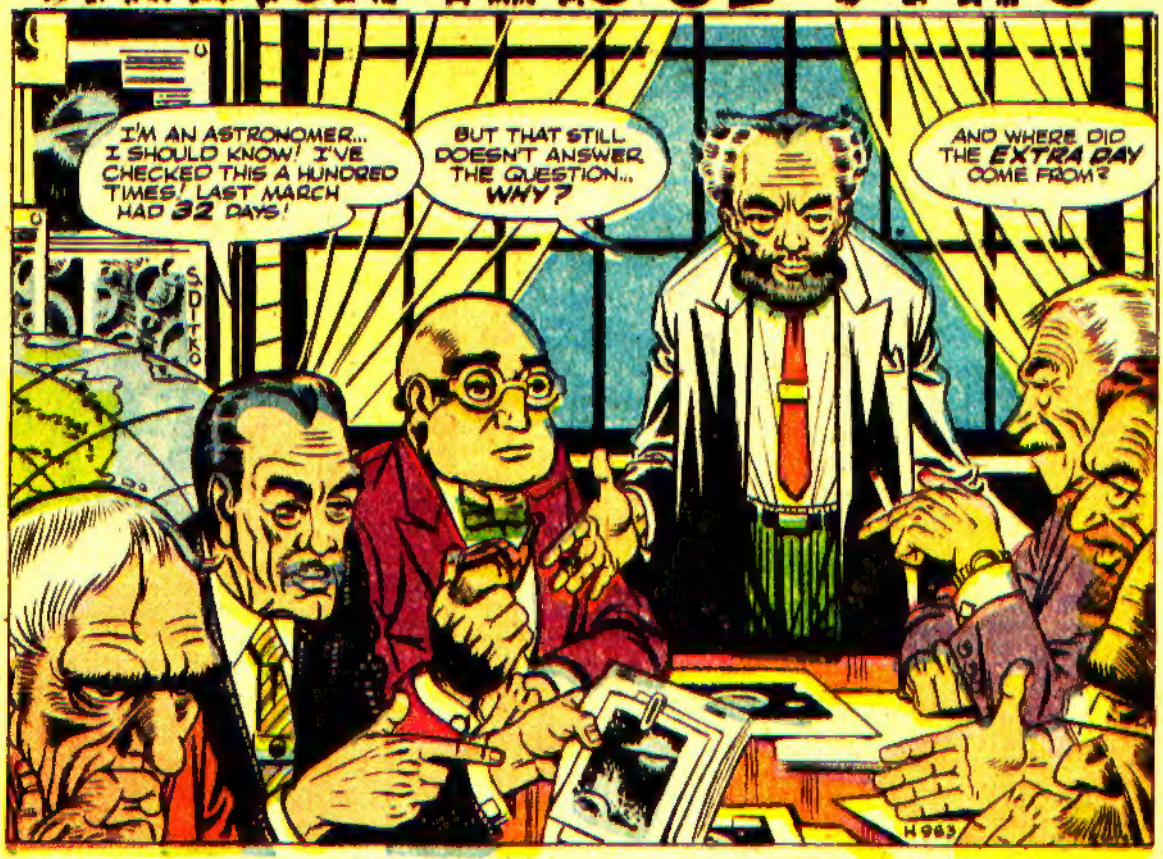
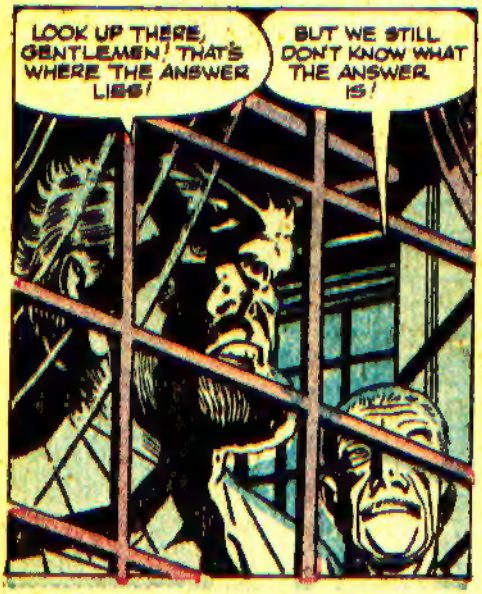

FOR WEEKS, THE FACTORY HUMMED WITH ACTIVITY...
WE MAY NOT BE MAKING MONEY BUT SOMEHOW IT FEELS GOOD JUST TO BE WORKIN' AGAIN!
MEANWHILE...
WE JUST HAPPENED TO BE DRIVING THROUGH BRADFORD VALLEY! IT'S THE LOVELIEST TOWN WE'VE EVER SEEN!
I NOTICE YOUR FACTORY TURNS OUT PRE-FAB HOMES.. I WANT TO PLACE A LARGE ORDER!
WE'D ALL LIKE TO PLACE ORDERS WITH YOUR FACTORY, MAYOR ANDREWS!
THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN! OUR CRAFTSMEN ARE TURNING OUT THE FINEST PARTS FOR HOUSING CONSTRUCTION!
SO-WITHIN A SHORT TIME PROSPERITY CAME TO THE PEOPLE, AND WITH IT, RENEWED PRIDE IN THE PAST...
YOU SAID JOHN DENTON'S MONUMENT COULD GO BACK IN THE TOWN SQUARE... BUT IT'S VANISHED!
THE SILENT STRANGER HAS ALSO DISAPPEARED, AND WE WANTED TO THANK HIM FOR ALL THIS!
THAT STATUE MUST BE SOMEWHERE ABOUT! LET'S HAVE ANOTHER LOOK THRU THE WAREHOUSE!
YOU MUST HAVE LOOKED AT THE WRONG PEDESTAL, ABIGAIL! WELL, WE'LL TAKE IT BACK TO THE SQUARE!
AFTER A THOROUGH CLEANING, THE MONUMENT OF JOHN DENTON WAS MOVED TO THE SQUARE...
WHY, (GASP!) WE'VE FOUND THE SILENT STRANGER! I'D FORGOTTEN WHAT THE FACE OF THAT STATUE LOOKED LIKE!
THANK YOU, JOHN!
THE END

OUR CALENDAR IS UNCHANGING... PREDICATED ON THE EARTH'S FIXED ORBIT THROUGH SPACE! EACH DAY HAS ITS ALLOTTED NUMBER OF HOURS! EACH MONTH HAS ITS ALLOTTED NUMBER OF DAYS!

MARCH HAS 32 DAYS


I'M AN ASTRONOMER... I SHOULD KNOW! I'VE CHECKED THIS A HUNDRED TIMES! LAST MARCH HAD 32 DAYS!
BUT THAT STILL DOESN'T ANSWER THE QUESTION... WHY?
AND WHERE DID THE EXTRA DAY COME FROM?
SDITKO
H 963



LET US TAKE LEAVE OF EARTH'S FOREMOST SCIENTISTS AND GO BACK IN TIME TO 24 HOURS *BEFORE* THE DAY FROM NOWHERE! JOHN BILLINGS' FIRST ACT EACH DAY WAS TO RIP YESTERDAY OFF THE CALENDAR NEXT TO HIS BED..

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NOW ON THIS GLORIOUS MARCH 31ST, HE DROVE TO HIS OFFICE..
HAVE TO BE MORE CAREFUL NEXT TIME! I ALMOST WOKE UP LISA WHEN I KISSED HER GOOD-BYE!
AT THE OFFICE, HE WAS ALL BUSINESS AND COLD EFFICIENCY..
I'LL BE LEAVING FOR THE FINAL INSPECTION OF THE NEW BRIDGE, AS SOON AS I'VE GONE THROUGH THE MAIL!
BUT THEN HIS TELEPHONE RANG..
HONEYBUN!
I'LL BE AT THE AIRPORT AT 11:15! YOU'LL BE THERE TO SEE ME OFF, WON'T YOU, HONEYBUN?
HE COULD NEVER DENY LISA ANYTHING, BUT SUDDENLY HE WAS FROWNING..
THE BRIDGE! I CAN'T HOLD UP THE OPENING ANY LONGER AND I WAS GOING TO INSPECT IT THIS MORNING!
THERE'S NOT A CHANCE IN A MILLION OF ANYTHING GOING WRONG!
I COULD NEVER SAY NO TO YOU, LISA! OF COURSE, I'LL BE THERE!
AND SO, AT 11:15 A.M. OF THAT GLORIOUS MARCH 31ST..
I'LL BE COUNTING THE MINUTES, LISA.. PLEASE COME BACK SOON!
GO AIR

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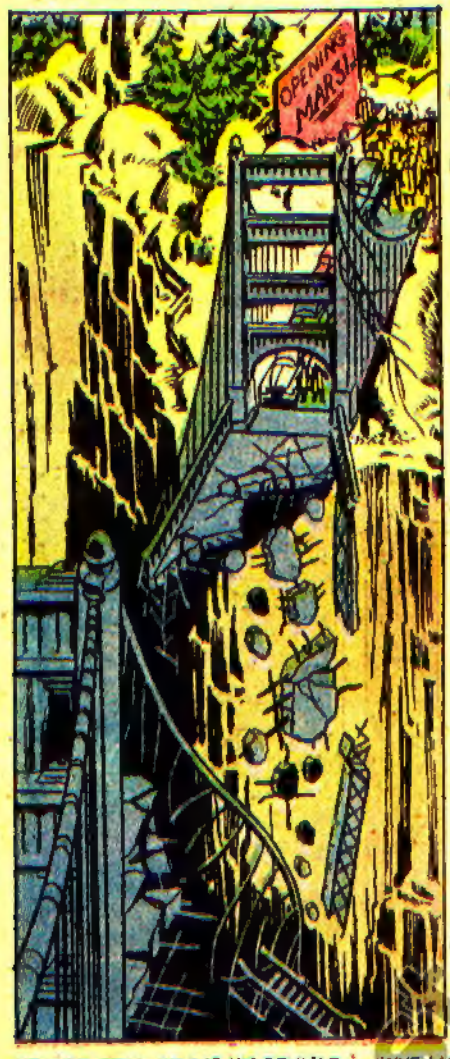
AND AT 11:17, OUT AT THE CHASM...



WHEN JOHN BILLINGS HEARD THE NEWS BULLETIN, HE WAS DAZED WITH GUILT!

... BRIDGE COLLAPSED! NOBODY HURT... BUT EVERYBODY LIVING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHASM... DEPRIVED OF THE EASIER LIFE THEY HAD BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO...

HE NEVER REMEMBERED DRIVING TO THE CHASM, BUT HE WAS THERE NOW!

IT WAS THEN THAT HE HEARD THE VOICE INSIDE HIM...

HE WAS STILL CRYING HIS DENIALS WHEN HE BLACKED OUT...

WHEN HIS EYES FLUTTERED OPEN, HE WAS HOME! IT WAS MORNING, AND THERE BESIDE HIS BED...

HE WAS DRIVING TO THE OFFICE NOW, HIS FACE SET GRIMLY...

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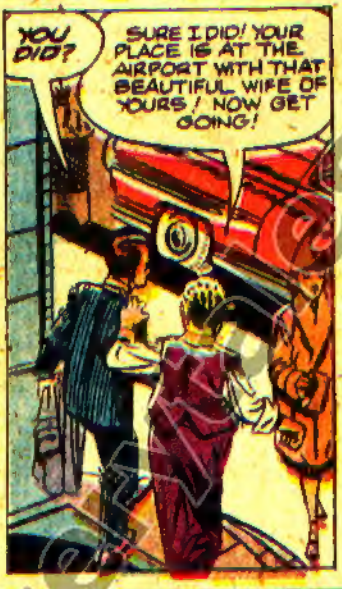
BUT BEFORE HE COULD FINISH READING THE MAIL, HIS DESK TELEPHONE RANG...
I'M SORRY, LISA... THAT'S FINAL! I'M NOT COMING TO THE AIRPORT!

JOHN, WE COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARING! DON'T BE A FOOL... GO TO THE AIRPORT!
I WENT OVER EVERY INCH OF THAT BRIDGE MYSELF LAST NIGHT! IT'S IN PERFECT SHAPE, READY FOR THE OPENING!



AND SO, ON THIS SECOND MARCH 31ST, JOHN BILLINGS HEADED FOR THE AIRPORT AGAIN! BUT AS HE DROVE...
THAT VOICE INSIDE ME... I'M DOING JUST WHAT IT SAID I WOULD DO!

HE HAD AVERTED THE BRIDGE'S COLLAPSE BY FINDING A BASIC STRUCTURAL FLAW! NOW ALL HE COULD DO WAS SIT, THE STRENGTH DRAINED OUT OF HIM...
A DAY CAN'T REPEAT ITSELF! YESTERDAY MUST HAVE BEEN A BAD DREAM! NOTHING ELSE!

BUT SOMETIME LATER, AT THE SCIENTISTS' MEETING...
THERE'S NO USE STAYING ANY LONGER, GENTLEMEN! ALL WE CAN AGREE ON IS THAT MARCH HAD 32 DAYS... AND WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHY!